



All the Best Podcast
Episode 28: "Friendships and Fairways"
Featuring Emmy award winning sportscaster Jim Nantz

Jim: We went to pick them up in this little harbor on a stormy day in Maine, shrouded in fog, pulling into this little port, agents and flanker boats, communicating with agents that are on the pier, and all of a sudden you can see something orange off at a distance. It was President Clinton in an orange Polo. Anyway, the two of them, they have a big warm embrace, these two guys, it was just awesome. There was nobody to take a picture of that or record that. He just thought it was gonna be great to be able to shuttle him back. It's about a 45 minutes on the boat, by the way, back to Walker's Point.

Problem was President Clinton had recently had a heart procedure and it was stormy day, so the ocean was rough. We've been jostled quite a bit and he said, "You know, I probably shouldn't do that. I don't want to knock anything loose, which might if we went back by car." So this little detail had not been worked out. So president says, "Come on, Jimmy, we're gonna go back by land," and we got into a suburban. We didn't have the kind of convoy you think you would have with two presidents, and we went down the interstate of Maine in traffic getting through Portland and no one had any idea, there were not sirens going on for motorcycle police leading the way, and we just took our time and just listened to these two guys sit and reminisce all the way back to the compound.

George: My first place, I believe that character is a part of being present.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All The Best," the official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All The Best."

We're mountaineers, volunteers
We're the tide that rolls, we're Seminoles

We're one big country nation, that's right

Man: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I tried to do that in public life all through it.

We're one big country nation, that's right

Barbara: You are a human being first, and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investment you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight for a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All The Best."

We're one big country nation, that's right

Sam: Jim Nantz is a three-time Emmy Award winner and a five-time national sportscaster of the year. In 2007, Jim became the first commentator in history to broadcast the Super Bowl, NCAA Men's Final Four, and the Masters all on the same year, and he has since done it four more times. Jim has received numerous awards including the Arnie Award for golfers who give back, the PGA Ambassador of Golf Award, and has been inducted into the Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame.

Over the years, Jim has developed a deep friendship with my grandfather, George H. W. Bush who subsequently wrote the forward to Jim's "New York Times" bestseller "Always by My Side," which chronicled his life and career and his devotion to his father. Jim, it is an absolute honor to welcome you to "All The Best."

Jim: Sam, it is such a pleasure, it's a little surreal. You know when you get interviewed by a friend, someone who feels like family, you know, you try to act like I'm the subject and you're the interviewer, but all of those barriers and roles, we're gonna toss to the side for a moment and just talk as two buddies who have known each other for a... I've known you almost your whole life, so it's good to be with you.

Sam: I've got a bunch of questions here, Jim. But to start, you're one of the leading sports casters on the planet, and we're just emerging from this bizarre period of time where life, work, and, most importantly, sports were put on hold.

I can only imagine what it's been like for you as this is normally among the craziest parts of the year with the Final Four, the Masters. How are you coping?

Jim: I'm coping fine. Obviously I miss those events, but it is what it is. I had a hard time coping to figure out a way to wean myself mentally off of the hamster wheel that I've been on for years, running off to go do another broadcast, where all I live for, where those two or three days a week I could be at home surrounded by my family. But all the while you still got the energy and the preparation, the anxiety getting ready for your next game, your next event. How am I gonna travel there? What's the weather gonna be like? How am I gonna get home? You're conditioned.

And it truly took me a couple of weeks to kind of settle in and embrace the fact that the silver lining, I've heard so many people say it, of being able to be with your family, with unrushed, loving, quality time. We've got all three of my kids in the house now for seven weeks. We take walks, we play games, we all can't wait to get through this and get our worlds back to where they once were. But they're gonna be a time where I'm gonna look back on this and say, "Gosh, you know, that was so special, I got to teach my little boy." He wanted to learn how to play golf, so we've been hitting a little Wiffle balls around the yard. Both my four and six-year olds learned how to ride a bike during this. It's been so many joyous, wonderful little moments that I'm grateful for.

Wouldn't want to have to go through the pandemic ever again to be able to appreciate these kinds of things, but it's a reset button, I think, on how we look at the world, isn't it? I mean, you totally appreciate things with more gratitude in your heart now than you did before. I believe everyone should.

Sam: I know everyone's ready for some sort of normalcy in sports, it's such a big part of that. Well, Jim, during my Uncle George W.'s wonderful eulogy, during Gampy's funeral service in Washington DC, he spoke about brothers from other mothers or unofficial family members that we have been so lucky to have adopted through my grandparent's amazing life. And you were one of the few mentioned alongside former President Bill Clinton. Can you take our listeners back to the beginning? How did you meet my grandparents and start forging the genuine and lasting friendship you had with them?

Jim: It really goes to the time that 41 left office in early 1993. Went back to Houston, and their golf course where they play their golf down there was Houston Country Club, and the golf professional at Houston Country Club happened to be is a close a friend as I'll ever have on the planet, Paul Marchand. And Paul was your grandparent's head professional, gave them lessons and everything. So even along the way, being the sports fan that 41 was, he would

say to Paul, knowing the relationship, "How's your buddy Jim Nantz doing?" And Paul would call me and say, "President," this is while he's still in office, "was asking about you today." I get the biggest kick out of it. And, you know, I kind of couldn't believe they actually have any handle on who I was, but the City of Houston always has been very supportive and has embraced me as one of their own. And having a Houston kid who made it to the network, well the president caught on to that at some point, and he would always know the relationship with Paul and say, "I can't wait to meet him one day."

Well, here comes 1993, I'm gonna be in Houston, and Paul arranges for a chance to meet and play golf with your grandfather at Public Horse Memorial Park. So we were waiting for him in the pro shop, of course, they knew that he was on the way. So here comes the motorcade, and 41 hops out of the car, big firm handshake, "Great to meet you, I'm proud of you. Let's go in and let's take care of the greens fees. I've got them, by the way." So he walks in and goes right to the counter, puts his wallet down, and says, "I've got four golfers and two carts." And the assistant pro behind the counter said, "Oh no, Mr. President, you're our guest, there's no charges, I guess." "No, no, you don't understand, I don't want any freebies, I'm paying." And she said, "We can't do that, sir, you're totally our guest." And he said, "I'm not leaving until you let me pay for this."

And this is a great little philosophical moment. He says, "I don't want you to think that I think that I can come to Memorial Park and play for free. Because if I think that you may believe that I'm gonna come take advantage of this and I can come anytime I want to play for free, I'm not gonna ever come back again. So the short of it is, I don't want you to think that I think I'm supposed to get comp. I want to pay, and if you allow me to pay, I will come back again, but if you don't let me pay, I'll probably never be back again." So she looked at him and said, "Okay, Mr. President, it's whatever it was." It was \$145, and he took a credit card out and she swiped it and off we went and we played.

You mentioned earlier about the busy life that he had and we also spoke about how there's this reset button on gratitude and love and appreciation of letting people know what they were in your life, he never looked back and thought, "Well, I need to have more gratitude," because he was always that way. We need to look like what 41 looked like when we come out of this pandemic. We need to treat people the way he always treated people, with love and respect and kindness.

Footnote to that day, we got to the 16th hole and we were playing as partners and he said, "Hey, we just lost the overall match, what do you say we press these guys?" And I said, "Well sure, what are we playing for?" I want to know what we were getting ourselves into. I didn't know. For all I knew maybe he

was a big high stakes guy who can play for like a thousand dollars a hole. I was just out there nervous as can be, trying to behave correctly, and he says, "Do you want to press these guys? We've already lost the overall." I said, "What are we playing for?" He says, "A dollar." And I thought, well then maybe the dollar was code for \$1,000, which would have been a pricey affair.

I said, "You mean like a dollar or a dollar means something else or...?" He goes, "No, just a good old American dollar." I said, "You know what? Let's do it. Let's be bold. Let's plan for that dollar." So we won the press, so no money exchanged hands, nobody won a dollar, and by the end of the day, he had invited me to Walker's Point that summer.

Sam: Well, Jim, the theme of our podcast is service. And early on you recruited Gampy to help your annual Three Amigos Tournament, which is not bad duty when you're hanging out with the likes of Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and your buddy, Freddy Couples. What was the net effect of all those efforts?

Sam: Well, like everything else he touched, he gave our charity efforts great credibility, and he was the honorary chairman of the Three Amigos. That would be Freddy, Blaine McAllister, and myself. We were roommates at the University of Houston. He attended every single event, all the functions. This wasn't just a one-night dinner banquet kind of a thing, there was golf over the course of two days. He attended everything, so did your grandmother, and we had so much fun. You mentioned Arnold and Jack, we had Gene Sarazen, we had Byron Nelson, we had Alan Shepard come one year. Just an incredible list of people that came to Houston, we recognized them, we raised a lot of money. And when President saw someone make an effort on the service side, he just gets so fired up. He didn't care what the charity was, he just cared that somebody was doing something to give back, to make things better for someone else. He loved that, he thrived on that.

You know, we all remember the speech and "a thousand points of light," I mean he believed it. That wasn't about a phrase that some scriptwriter coined. This was really what he believed in, to his core, he loved it. So he saw three younger guys at that time who latched on to a philanthropic initiative and he wanted to be on board and he got right and he loved it.

Sam: Well, Jim, you played a very important role for my grandfather after he invited President Clinton to Maine for the first time. I mentioned you're one of the brothers from another mother, President Clinton was one of those as well. Would you mind taking us behind the scenes for that weekend?

Jim: It's a beautiful story and it says a lot about both presidents. The backstory on it is in the holidays of 2004 there was a tsunami in Southeast Asia that caused terrible devastation to the area. And 43, the great 43 came up with a plan to get his father and President Clinton together to spearhead a fundraising effort around the world. And again, they were both all in, it was called the Bush Clinton Initiative, and together they raised \$1.5 billion. They traveled around, did fundraising events, and a friendship evolved, a real genuine care for one another. I can still remember, I was at the Final Four in St. Louis, this is Final Four 2005. I'm at the Friday shoot around practice and I'm talking to Roy Williams, the head coach of North Carolina. My phone keeps vibrating in my pocket and I'm wondering, is there an emergency at home?

So I happened, while Roy was...turned his back for a moment, I looked down and I saw my specially encoded phone numbers, said 41, so I knew it was your grandad. And I said, "Coach, good luck this weekend, I have a phone call to take," stepped aside and said, "Mr. President, I see you've been trying to call me." He says, "I need a favor." He said, "You know, I've been traveling all over with President Clinton, he's quite a guy. We're having so much fun. I really enjoyed getting to know him at a different level. I'd like you to come up, we've been talking about having a social visit together, a chance to kind of go vacation somewhere together." And ultimately I said, "You need to come up to Maine. That makes the most sense." So President Clinton said he accepts.

And then I told him, "We need an intermediary, we need somebody there to keep the conversation going." As you can tell, no doubt in this Zoom call, I have no problem conversing. He said, "We both agreed you should be the guy, I recommended you. President Clinton said, 'Sure, have him come.' So we want to know we're both not working, you're the guy that's working all the time, when can you do it?" So suddenly I had the date hinged on my schedule and I gave him a date. He did go back to President Clinton and asked him of that first date work and he was releasing a book about this time, the first date didn't work.

So he came back and asked for another date in June of that year and it worked. And next thing you know we got a two-day trip plan, nobody knows about it, that's top-secret. And part of the cool thing was the pickup, getting President Clinton on campus, so to speak. So he arranged for a book tour visit to a bookstore somewhere in the upper reaches of Maine and we were gonna go pick them up on Fidelity Three, I think, at the time. So we did. We went to pick them up in this little harbor on a stormy day in Maine, shrouded in fog, pulling into these little port, agents and flanker boats, communicating with agents that are on the pier, and all of a sudden you can see something orange off at a distance, it was President Clinton in an orange [inaudible 00:14:24].

Anyway, the two of them, they have a big warm embrace, these two guys. It was just awesome, there was nobody to take a picture of that or record that. He just thought it was gonna be great to be able to shuttle him back, it's about 45 minutes on the boat, by the way, back to Walker's Point. Problem was President Clinton had recently had a heart procedure and it was stormy day, so the ocean was rough. We've been jostled quite a bit and he said, "You know, I probably shouldn't do that, I don't want to knock anything loose, which might if we went back by car."

So this little detail had not been worked out. So President, "Just come on, Jimmy, we're gonna go back by land." And we got into a Suburban, we didn't have the kind of convoy you think you would have with two presidents. And we went down the interstate of Maine in traffic getting through Portland and no one had any idea. There were not sirens going on for motorcycle police leading the way, and we just took our time, and just listened to these two guys sit and reminisce all the way back to the compound.

Sam: And that blossomed to an amazing relationship between the two.

Jim: Amazing. And the first night we went out to Stripers and we had a little table in the back, we had a glorious time, and your grandmother, God bless her, about halfway through appetizers, I'm sitting to her right. She elbows me. She says, "Jimmy, you got two presidents sitting here at the table across from one another. It'd be nice if you made a toast to these two guys." As if I should have already thought about it.

Sam: No pressure. She'll lay the pressure right on you.

Jim: Put the pressure on, she wasn't gonna filter it all. She basically thought I probably should have already done it, but I didn't want to assume that I had any juice to stand up and salute these guys. So I took deep breath and thought about it and I got up, and I think, that's like a recall, I'm sure it's through time, it's gotten better in my head but I thought I'd delivered one of the best toast of my career about how this message of these two guys. Nobody knows you're out here together, but someday the world will find out. You guys just enjoy hanging out together. What a wonderful snapshot this is about how America works. My gosh, would it be something we could do something like that today? Leave it to your granddad, though, to unite people together.

And I said, it's just such a powerful message. Look at these guys, once political rivals who can now enjoy each other's fellowship and friendship, and that was my message. And yes, by the next day, the word had gotten out. All the

network news operations had the satellite trucks circling around outside on Ocean Avenue, trying to get a glimpse of the two of them together, but it went on, their togetherness, for the rest of 41's life.

When your granddad died, I was in Atlanta getting ready for a Falcons-Ravens football game and I was meeting with John Harbaugh. Of course, your granddad had died the night before and I was in no condition even really to work that day. But I saw, I got a phone call from President Clinton. I excused myself from the meeting with the coach and went back into a private room, and for almost 15 minutes, he said, "I just wanted to call. I just wanted to commiserate, I just wanted to relive those times we had together with 41." It was one of the most special calls ever. For 15 minutes, we sat and talked about how fortunate we were to have had the relationship, the friendship that we had with the great 41.

Sam: You know, President Clinton and yourself, they aren't the only relationships that my grandfather made over the years, he seemed to have a special relationship with the PGA Tour and its golfers. You were, of course, there to witness so many special occasions and big events like the President's Cup. Why were those bonds of friendship and affection so strong?

Jim: Golf espouses certain virtues that line up with exactly what 41 was about, honor, tradition, respect for one another. It's the biggest charity sport there is, the money they raised, service to others. So I mean it was a perfect blend of the way 41 approached life to the way that golf has its basic rules of doing things with honor. And he played with everyone that you could pretty much want a name that would have been the top players and had deep personal relationships with the greatest legends in the game and they loved him back.

I remember being at Walker's Point the day after Justin Leonard won the British Open. And we're having lunch on the back patio and he said, "That was some win, that seems like such a nice boy." And I said, "You know, you ought to call him." "Do you think he'd take my call?" I said, "You know, Mr. President, I think he probably would." He said, "Well, how would we go about that?" I said, "Well, let me make a couple of calls." And within 10 minutes we had Justin Leonard on the phone. And he's sitting out there, big smile on his face, looking out over the ocean. "Hey, Justin, Yeah, it's George Bush. I just, hey, enjoyed that so much yesterday. Barbara is here, we just wanted to congratulate you." And he was like starstruck, for lack of a better term, and he's talking to a 20-something-year-old major champion.

Here's a guy that's got a resume that I always say is the greatest resume in the history of our country, but he would get tickled over little things like that. It

was the same thing, by the way, when President Clinton came up to Walker's Point, the second year we were gonna have President Clinton come up. And I got invited to be the mediator, the fly on the wall the next year, and he said, "We ought to have another golfer with us, a fourth. Can you think of somebody that President Clinton would get a real kick out of?" He said, "I don't want anybody flying in from California being inconvenienced, nothing crazy like that. I need somebody who's close by." I said, "How about Tom Brady?"

On the other end of the phone I thought the cell dropped out, I couldn't hear him say anything. And then I realized he was like in disbelief. And then he said, "Tom Brady? You're talking about the New England Patriots quarterback, Tom Brady?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Do you really think he'd come up [inaudible 00:19:57], play golf with us?" And I said, "Sir, you, President Clinton, I kind of like the chances." He says, "By all means, oh, my gosh, would you please invite them? It's unbelievable." So I said, "Sure."

So, you know, I had a magic number to call Tom and I called him and told him what the situation was. It took a little cajoling for a while for him to be convinced this wasn't some sort of stupid prank on my part, and once he realized it was a real genuine offer, he was all in. And what a thrill it was to call 41 back and say, "Tom Brady is in." And he just, again, giddy as a little boy, "Tom Brady is gonna come see us?" and he did.

Sam: Well. Jim, you've been telling so many great stories about my grandfather, but I just got that elbow you were talking about earlier. I'm sure you have many stories about my grandmother as well. Would you be willing to share one?

Jim: One time she attended a charity event that I was part of in Houston, and there was a new diet and new fad diet that was out, that had to do with your blood type, you get your blood type and you could phase in certain foods and your body could digest and absorb it, and if you just ate only the food group that was inside of the checklist, you could lose a lot of weight. Worked for Jack Nicklaus, who had introduced it to us. So she heard about it at the table, at this event. When she heard I was on it and that Jack Nicklaus is on it, she took it on, "I'm gonna do this." That probably was in April. And now they transitioned from Houston to Maine, and she's on this diet and she's gonna do everything she does. She's 100% and she's not gonna cut corners.

But after about a month of being in Maine and she had so few things that she could eat, Jean called me and said, "You got her onto this, would you please call her and tell her she does not need to be on this diet because she's miserable?" You know, this is the time of year where they love being able to entertain and have dinners and people, and she wasn't enjoying that part of her

life. So at Jean's request, I picked up the phone and spoke to Mrs. Bush and I said, "I'm really proud of your effort." It sounds crazy. "Proud of your effort and it's okay. I'm going off of it. I can't live like this anymore either, I need to dial back, I want my life back." So I joined her as we left the system to get back to where we could go enjoy a decent dinner at night.

Sam: Well, I'm sure she was happy to get that call from you.

Jim: Huge.

Sam: Well, Jim, I know you help countless good causes as an emcee and in other ways too, but what you've created at the Nantz National Alzheimer Center at Methodist Hospital in Houston is truly amazing. Can you tell everyone what you've been doing with it since its creation in 2011?

Jim: Thank you for bringing that up, Sam. It's named for my father first, the Nantz National Alzheimer Center. Houston Methodist is a very big part of my life, that's where my father was treated for Alzheimer's by a doctor there named Stan Appel, the great Dr. Stan Appel. And he is a hero in the neurological world for Alzheimer's and ALS studies. He's a true legend. I realized after I wrote a book about my dad called "Always by My side" which your grandfather wrote the forward to, I realized there was something I needed to do bigger than just calling the next great championship of American sport. What could I do?

And in concert with Dr. Appel, they were still trying to develop an Alzheimer's research and clinical care wing that was at a whole new level for them. So in 2011, along with my wife Courtney, we wrote the first check, we continue to financially support it and fundraise for it, and promise them that we could bring our best efforts to bring not only financial resources and revenues but other people to get involved. And we wanted to build, very simply, the best Alzheimer's clinical care and research center in the world. You're at the Texas Medical Center, look at what we have. Look at Methodist Hospital, one of the best hospitals in the universe. So anyway, we opened in 2011, we're a little more than nine years old. We hosted for the second or third time an International Symposium of Alzheimer's Researchers in February, Nobel Peace Prize visitors to our annual gathering of researchers. I'm really proud of, I'm especially proud that it has my father's name on it. But was I motivated, inspired by the Bushes? One hundred percent. Thanks for asking about it.

Sam: Of course. Well, I know they're so lucky to have advocates like you and Courtney to help support them and all the great things that they do. And, Jim, I want to end with this. You rendered my grandfather one final service during his funeral week in 2018 when you gathered an amazing group of sporting greats to

pay tribute to Gampy while he was laying in state at the Capitol. Who did you get together and what was that experience like?

Jim: There was the planning stages for 41 services and it goes years out. Jean Becker and her amazing team knew that they wanted to have different kind of pods, if you will, representing his life, his cabinet, desert storm, the library at A&M, whatever it might be, but sports was such a part of his life, their lives. They thought they should have a gathering of sportspeople. I was asked to be the kind of the chairman of that pod. So on the eve of the service in the National Cathedral, we had a dinner. Courtney and I decided, "You know what? We need to host something. Roll up our sleeves and treat these folks who are coming in to a memorable night and all we're gonna talk about are the Bushes."

From football we had Peyton Manning and his wife. From golf we had Freddie Couples and Blaine McAllister, the Amigos, along with Paul Marchand, Jack and Barbara Nicklaus, Phil and Amy Mickelson. Chrissy Evert from tennis was there along with her sister, Pam Shriver was there. And then we all broke down in tears on any number of occasions that night. The speeches were also heartfelt about how he had impacted their lives, everyone's lives. And in the end, I feel really good about saying, "I know it's exactly how 41 would have wanted it."

Sam: Well, Jim, I'd like to thank you so much for joining us on "All The Best." My uncle George was correct in saying you're one of the brothers from another mother. We've been so lucky to share so many great memories with you and Courtney and your children, and look forward to all the years to come and more memories. So thanks again for joining us on "All The Best".

Jim: You know what? It's time to go out and see my kids. I'm gonna tell them another story about a great guy that I once knew. I'm gonna go take a walk and remember how fortunate we are, the gratitude we have in our lives, that there are people you meet along the way who love you and care about you and give you a good, honest look at what a life well-lived looks like. So thank you, Sam.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All The Best" on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate "All The Best."

We're one big country nation, that's right

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every house all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency and honor, courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country, America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America, the greatest country on the face of the earth.

